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Budget-cut details won't see light until Thursday

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PROVIDENCE — Residents will have to wait until later this week for the fine-print details on how Mayor David N. Cicilline plans to balance the city budget, despite original pronouncements that more information would be available yesterday.

Now, the mayor and City Council leaders will present a joint proposal Thursday, the result of intense discussions over the weekend.

When he outlined his plan at a City Hall news conference Wednesday, Cicilline said he would have details yesterday, when he was to have officially presented the plan to City Council members.

But yesterday his administration and the council said they were not ready to go public, but that they were meeting privately and making significant progress.

"That was the original plan, but now it's going to be Thursday," Cicilline spokeswoman Karen Southern said of the earlier date.

Providence is facing what now appears to be a deficit in excess of \$27.5 million on Cicilline's \$625.9-million budget for

the fiscal year that began Sunday.

Last week, Cicilline gave the broad sketches of how he planned to address that hole. His initial plan called for broad School Department cuts, the elimination of several dozen vacant positions, mandatory furlongs and health-care cost increases for nonunion employee and an increase in the property tax levy that could approach the maximum allowed, which is 5.25 percent.

Unlike most Rhode Island cities, Providence has historically gone past the July 1 start of the new fiscal year without a budget, and then used the month of July for budget hearings and final deliberations.

The council leadership — primarily Finance Chairman John J. Igliazzi, Majority Leader Terrence M. Hassett and Council President Peter S. Mancini — have met with Cicilline's finance team at length on each of the last four days, trying to hammer out their differences, and Igliazzi said that they were doing well.

"We were there for, like, six hours on Saturday. We under-

stand the seriousness of the situation and we're all heeding that call," Igliazzi said.

Igliazzi would not get into specifics, but said that the meetings have been very productive, and that the two sides have been dealing with macro-level issues

— including some that cannot be changed for the current fiscal year but will be changed for the 2009 fiscal year.

"It's been a very good process, as far as I'm concerned."

Hassett has said that "across-the-board cuts" and the elimination of some city boards and commissions were under discussion, along with staff reductions and salary cuts.

He expects that, should all go

well Thursday, the public hearing on the proposed budget would be scheduled for July 19. In the interim, the council would consider more revisions to the document they announce Thursday.

"We're going to continue our discussions because there will be some additional changes," Igliazzi said.

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